

## **Infrastructure Materials Bill Would Undermine Local Professionals**

**By Tom Richards – City Manager, Harbor Springs**

**Michael Cain – City Manager, Boyne City**

**Thomas D. Cannon - City Administrator, City of East Jordan**

According to Gov. Rick Snyder's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Infrastructure Commission, most of the drinking and wastewater systems throughout our state need to be repaired or replaced. The commission has found that most of our major water infrastructure systems are between 50 and 100 years old. These systems are operated locally and each local unit of government has the obligation to design, operate and maintain their water system to ensure the protection of the public's health and safety

Restoring the safety and reliability of our local systems demands that communities rebuild our infrastructure with the materials that are the best match for our unique local conditions and circumstances. We must not allow the constraints proposed by the legislature to interfere with those decisions, and our ability to make the best choices.

Several times now, legislation has been proposed that would restrict the ability of local project managers and engineers to decide the best pipe materials to use in our communities. These bills have been offered under the guise of opening municipal bids to more competition and driving down costs. Unfortunately, what this legislation will do is undermine our local water professionals and local control.

Currently, engineers work closely with our utilities and local government to develop and design these systems for maximum safety and reliability. This collaborative process is critical for long-term planning, development, maintenance and cost-containment of public projects across the state.

In Harbor Springs, Boyne City and East Jordan, we have several types of materials in our system. That includes both ductile iron and plastic, but we also firmly believe that the choice of pipe materials should always be based on function, reliability, and then cost. Not all pipes are suitable for every project, because pipe materials react differently to different conditions and environments. This legislation would force a communities like ours to prioritize cost over function and reliability.

Our residents and property owners expect us to use the most knowledgeable and experienced professionals to help us select the best materials and designs to address our own unique and local conditions.

Elected officials in Lansing need to understand that engineers and local communities are not asking for this legislation. Instead, we oppose it because it does not address a problem, but it would only interfere with our local procurement process and our accountability to the public. Let's hope our state lawmakers will oppose Senate Bill 157 and House Bill 5723 and support our ability to protect your health and safety.